

**Questions from the 10/29/13 Webinar: Transitioning to
Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards (AZCCRS) for Students with Disabilities**

Q: How will this help Native American students? Many Native American students speak English, but think in a Native way.

A: Researchers, including indigenous scholars and researchers in Indian education, have approached the topic of learning styles of indigenous students in a number of different ways. Despite the variety of approaches, these researchers and society in general recognize that students of an indigenous tribal nation are strongly influenced by their respective indigenous language, culture, and heritage; thus, it is recognized that students have learning styles harmonious with those of their nations and communities. Research further finds that indigenous students learn in ways that emphasize harmony, holistic perspectives, creativity, family-community learning, and learning that honors deep reflection. Implications for such learning styles and interventions require that curriculum, instructional practice, and assessments take the above into consideration.

Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards (AZCCRS) take into account the above and further encourage educators to design individual student learning programs that employ culturally responsive teaching techniques. First, the standards encourage presentation of content through diverse, creative media and in a variety of formats. The standards also rely on multiple forms of assessment to match student learning styles. These variable content presentation and assessment types enable a holistic approach to learning. More specifically, and honoring the emphasis on deep reflection, the pedagogy shifts the focus to the development of critical thinking and problem solving. Teachers are required to provide time to allow students to consider options before responding and to be persistent in conceptualizing problems.

Educators are encouraged to invite students to provide sources, including written historical records or transcripts of interviews provided by elder family members to corroborate students' writing of text that is supported by sources. Also, as with any effective teaching and learning, family-community learning is encouraged.

Q: Please explain how one can understand content without decoding information.

A: If a student cannot decode material or is weak in decoding, then other strategies or accommodations for instruction should be considered, such as using text-to-speech readers or presenting information in a visual way by using graphic organizers or outlines. Students can access text auditorily with the use of audiobooks, read-alouds, etc. Students with disabilities often struggle with decoding but are able to comprehend at a much higher level than their decoding level. Giving students the opportunity to access text auditorily or through graphic methods will allow those students with limited decoding skills to access the grade-level standards.

Q: If students can't decode and can't do basic math and you don't have assistive technology (AT) available, how do you engage those students at grade level?

A: There are strategies and visual supports that can assist a student in math. If the IEP team considers assistive technology and determines that a student needs it in order to access the general curriculum, the school must find a way to provide it.

Q: Many of my students do not have Kindles or other devices nor does the district provide them. If these devices are not available, how can students listen to audio versions and thereby attain the deeper skills the AZCCRS wants us to address?

A: If the IEP team considers assistive technology and determines that a student needs it in order to access the general curriculum, the school must find a way to provide it.

Many types of assistive technology (AT) are free or relatively cheap. If you are unsure of the type of AT that may be most helpful, the ADE/ESS AT Short-Term Lending Library may be able to lend a piece of equipment (e.g., tablet) to trial with a student. If you have questions about the Lending Library or are looking for ideas about how to acquire AT, please contact the ADE/ESS Assistive Technology unit at: <http://www.azed.gov/special-education/assistive-technology/>.

Q: We don't have access to the technology needed to support our students' needs.

A: The IEP team must consider the need for assistive technology annually, and if assistive technology is necessary in order for the student to access the general curriculum, the school must find a way to provide it. For questions about how to consider AT, access the ADE/ESS AT Short-Term Lending Library, or for ideas on how to acquire free or low-cost AT, please contact the ADE/ESS Assistive Technology unit.

Q: Is it going to be the grade level or student level?

Q: So is the presenter describing a balancing of the grade-level skills with the lower-level skills?

Q: It still sounds unrealistic for children who are at least two years behind grade level.

A: IEP teams write goals based on individual student needs that align with the state standards. The requirements for writing goals do not change with the new standards. Additionally, goals should be aligned with the student's enrolled grade-level standards while addressing the student's needs and strengths (regardless of whether the student will be taking AIMS or AIMS A). Goals need to be written based on an individual student's needs while giving the student access to the general curriculum, which includes the standards. Goals should be written so as to be attainable (yet challenging) and to allow a student to be able to make progress in the general curriculum.

A student's instructional level plays a significant role in how an annual IEP goal is developed. By law, the States must have a set of academic standards to which public education agencies (PEAs) must adhere. In turn, all PEAs must develop their curricula, which are based on those state-determined academic standards. IEP annual goals must be based on the PEAs' curricula; therefore, goals based on PEAs' curricula are aligned to the state standards.

There is no law, regulation, or guidance document that states a team must develop goals that show a student is meeting the standards if formal (and informal) assessments show that a student is falling far below the standards for the grade level. If a goal begins with a baseline of performance, any gains achieved by the end of the IEP will be clear. An IEP team is required to ensure that the student is making progress in the general curriculum; if there is lack of expected progress, the team should reconvene to determine the causes and revise the IEP if the student is not progressing satisfactorily. Goals should be challenging yet attainable in the life of the current IEP.

Q: Our district implemented AZCCRS three years ago and the math has been problematic. The skill levels of our students limit their full participation in skill development because of the complexity of the skills. Making accommodations presents a challenge.

A: Some of the challenges of the complexity of the skills for students participating in the alternate assessment are addressed in the instructional resources from the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), which provides supports for teachers in breaking the standards into smaller pieces.

As stated above, an IEP team is required to ensure that the student is making progress in the general curriculum; if there is lack of expected progress, the team should reconvene to determine the causes and revise the IEP if the student is not progressing satisfactorily. Goals should be challenging yet attainable in the life of the current IEP.

One district in the webinar stated that teachers have had success with cross-curricular teaching and supporting math by finding connections to math with other subjects. The teachers used comprehension passages during reading blocks of time that pertained to math. The students learned math while practicing their reading fluency.

Q: What standard do we need to pick if a student is not at the grade level?

Q: How can you balance literature and informational text in an IEP's goal? Do you have to write two goals?

A: Standards are not randomly selected. A present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) should be written, which includes baseline data showing where the student is currently performing. The focus should be on goals that will help the student access the curriculum. The IEP team should analyze the student's strengths and needs, determine which skills would have the greatest impact on the progress of the student, and choose a standard that will accelerate skill acquisition based on this student's individual needs. This could mean more than one goal.

Q: Clarification please . . . are we supposed to be writing grade-level goals? That goes against everything that many of us have been trained to do. If we are writing grade-level standards, why are students on IEPs?

A: Yes, you are required by law to write goals that are aligned with the student's enrolled grade level. This is not new. When writing a goal, do not just restate the standards. Write goals aligned to enrolled grade-level standards while addressing the student's needs and strengths (regardless of whether the student will be taking AIMS or AIMS A). Goals need to be written based on an individual student's needs while giving the student access to the general curriculum, which includes the standards. Goals should be written so as to be attainable (yet challenging) and to allow a student to be able to make progress in the general curriculum.

Q: Why are students not assessed at their own ability level?

A: Student assessment and instruction should be aligned with the grade level for which students are enrolled. This is in federal law. All students with IEPs are required to take the state tests at their grade level regardless of what the tests involve (whether they are eligible to take the AIMS A or not).

Q: I cannot possibly write goals that are on grade level in this high school for students who are nonverbal. What is the compromise?

A: There are instructional supports for teachers whose students participate in the alternate assessment. The law requires that goals be aligned with the student-enrolled grade level. Please contact Audra Ahumada at Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov.

Q: I am concerned with how this will affect students who take AIMS A.

A: There are additional supports for students participating in the alternate assessment. Please contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov for copies of these resources that we are sharing with administrators and teachers. The AZCCRS can actually provide greater access to the general education curriculum for students since the standards are broadly written and not so skill based.

Q: So how is this going to mesh with the new situation in Arizona in which we will be retaining third graders who aren't reading on grade level?

A: The state education rule ARS 15-701 Move on When Reading (MOWR) set forth the requirements for determining which students with a disability can be exempt from the statute. Over the last few months,

several questions have arisen in regard to these requirements. To address those questions, Arizona Department of Education is providing the guidance:

In 2010, Arizona's revised statute A.R.S. § 15-701 established the requirement that a pupil not be promoted from the third grade if the pupil obtains a score on the reading portion of the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards test (AIMS) or a successor test, that demonstrates that the pupil's reading falls far below the third grade level. As stated in the law, there are two exemptions to this requirement:

“(1) A good cause exemption if the pupil is an English learner or a limited English proficient student as defined in section 15-751 and has had fewer than two years of English language instruction.

(2) A child with a disability as defined in section 15-761 if the pupil's individualized education program team and the pupil's parent or guardian agrees that promotion is appropriate based on the pupil's individualized education program.”

The second exemption protects children with disabilities that affect their ability to learn reading at grade level. If an IEP team determines the child's disability affects his/her reading ability, the IEP team, which includes the child's parent or guardian, will make a promotion/retention decision that is based on the best interests of the child.

If you have questions, contact Cindy Daniels at cindy.daniels@azed.gov.

Q: How would you teach the standards to a student who is in the 6th–8th grade but academically the student's levels are at pre-K or lower?

A: If the student is eligible to participate in the alternate assessment, there are instructional supports that will support both the teacher and student. These resources have been shared with special education administrators and teachers. For more information, you can contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov.

Q: I think it (AZCCRS) is a good idea, but what about the severe and profoundly disabled students.

Q: What about students who are significantly below grade level? We have seniors in high school who function at K–2 grade levels.

Q: Am I expected to teach grade-level math when I have some students who cannot even count to 10.

Q: I find this difficult when teaching a self-contained classroom with students that are in upper grades in middle school and are still working on letter identification and number recognition.

A: There are instructional supports for teachers who have students with significant cognitive disabilities. These resources have been shared with special education directors. Please contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov for more information.

Q: In terms of students in self-contained classrooms, what would be the best instructional methods to use since the AZCCRS are based on grade level? I hear your response now, but how does that apply to the cross categorical self-contained classroom?

A: For classrooms that have students with significant cognitive disabilities, there are instructional supports. Please contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov for more information.

Q: Will Audra have standards for me to teach high school students with moderate intellectual disabilities?

A: There are not separate standards, but we do have instructional supports from the alternate assessment consortium that provide access for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These resources have been shared with special education administrators. Please contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov

Q: You say the "same curriculum as their peers," but what about those school districts that have removed students who take the AIMS A test from resource classrooms to a totally different and very restrictive learning environment like a self-contained classroom?

A: If the student is participating in the alternate assessment, there are instructional resources that can support both teachers and students. These resources have been shared with special education directors. Please contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov for more information on these resources.

Q: Will the use of a scribe or a text-to-speech device be allowed on the AIMS or the upcoming PARCC?

Q: We could not agree more with the fact that all of us use tools. Does this mean that students will be able to use these tools when they are tested?

Q: If you have a student who is on the 3rd grade level in math in high school, how can this student ever pass the PARCC or AIMS tests without a calculator?

A: The accommodations and tools are addressed in the PARCC Accommodations Manual. You can access the manual on the PARCC website or by the link on the PARCC webpage on the ADE website: <http://www.azed.gov/standards-development-assessment/2013/01/18/parcc-whats-new/>.

Q: My understanding is that our students will still take AIMS in the fall. Text-to-speech devices aren't allowed.

A: Regarding AIMS, please refer to the AIMS Testing Accommodations Guidelines for School Year 2013–2014 at: <http://www.azed.gov/standards-development-assessment/files/2013/06/testing-accommodations-2013-2014.pdf>. For any specific questions, please have your AIMS District Test Coordinator contact the ADE Assessment department prior to the testing.

Q: At the high school level, it's very difficult to get to know students on your caseload when you don't have these students in class, but you do have over 100 OTHER kids in class. Do you have any ideas on how to address this issue?

A: The number of students in a caseload is a local control decision. If you feel that the number of students on your caseload is preventing you from providing the necessary services to students, then please see your special education director.

Q: A huge part of these standards is predicated on the listening/auditory component. What does that mean for our HI students who do not have that channel available to them?

A: The IEP team would need to discuss and determine how a student with HI would access those components of the curricula.

Q: How/when do we deliver individual education to students who are not in our classes because of inclusion?

A: The IEP team makes the decision on the specialized instruction. Specially designed instruction can be delivered in the general education classroom or it can be delivered in a separate setting. The IEP should stipulate what services are needed and when they will be delivered. When implementing inclusionary practices, the school/district should provide time for collaboration between the general education and the special education teachers to communicate what services need to be delivered, when they will be delivered, by whom, and in what location. If you have additional questions, please contact your Program Support and Monitoring Specialist.

Q: I don't typically rely on the general education teacher for data. I am using data collected only when a student is with me. My goal is something they do with me, not while with another teacher.

A: Getting accurate data from outside of your classroom could be data to help show if the student has generalized those skills.

Q: How do we get our general education teachers to contribute to progress reports?

A: Regular collaboration with general education teachers that focuses on content, lesson planning, and data will assist in building relationships between special education and general education teachers. Regularly scheduled time for communication is key to working together. How time is scheduled is a local control issue.

Q: I get the gist of this training but wonder about the standards for communication and work skills. It's more than just English and math, I would think.

A: There are no longer separate standards for communication or work skills; they are embedded in the AZCCRS.

Q: I am not sure this is the best thing for students with disabilities. If they could work on the same level as other students they could progress without support or IEPs.

A: The AZCCRS can provide access to a broader level for students with disabilities. With the AZCCRS, the comment is no longer “The child can’t learn this standard”; but “What part of this standard can the child learn?” We should be looking at what part or parts of the standards the child can do and what parts the child will need accommodations or modifications on.

Q: We have been told this year not to use the AZCCRS to write IEPs for our AIMS A students, but just to break down the grade-level standard for them. That is what we did with the old standards.

A: There is further clarification regarding the use of alternate academic standards and AZCCRS on the AIMS A webpage. You can also contact Audra.Ahumada@azed.gov for more information.

Q: Help me understand how to best help a 6th grade young man who only desires to be in the workforce and needs functional reading and math. He shows no interest in nonfiction historical text, but nonfiction historical text is his grade-level standard skill.

A: Differentiating the content, teaching process, and product to meet the student’s interest, readiness, and motivation can be done without straying from the standard. For example, provide nonfiction that deals with the specific kind of work he is interested in. Try to create a link between nonfiction history and how those events are similar to events that currently affect him or could affect the workforce. Link the mathematical skills with what will be required when he enters the workforce.

The Arizona Department of Education also provides Arizona K–12 schools with a free online career and educational planning tool, the Arizona Career Information System (AzCIS)(www.azcis.intocareers.org). The AzCIS Junior version supports reading, writing, decision making, and critical thinking skills while developing self-awareness, career exploration, research, and planning skills. The reading requirement for this product is fifth-grade level, making it appropriate for many special populations. The AzCIS High School version provides comprehensive Arizona career information for students developing and updating educational plans. Using AzCIS in high school supports lifelong career planning and promotes career self-reliance. AzCIS includes tools that encourage self-assessment, exploration, research, goal setting, and decision making. Check with your school’s counseling and guidance office for more information on how to login and use the system.

Q: Where are the samples of goals? Does ADE have examples of goals for AZCCRS in ELA and Math?

A: Additional samples will be provided in the two-day training.

Q: When is the two-day training taking place?

A: The two-day training will take place in Casa Grande January 28–29 and in Tempe on January 30–31, 2014. Registration is available at:

<http://www.ade.az.gov/onlineregistration/EventLocationSelection.asp?EventID=3321&EventDate=1/28/2014>.

Q: Will the two-day training go more in depth on how to write the goals that are more aligned to the standards? I am hearing from other special education teachers that is what is really needed.

A: Yes. In the two-day training, there will be plenty of hands-on work and examples.